CEN Filter Survey

Starting on September 23, 2008, an online survey was distributed to Connecticut's K-12 school districts in order to collect input on the CEN filter's current mandatory minimum filter settings. Using email listservs maintained by CEN staff, the RESCs, the State Library, and CAPSS, technology staff, educators, library media specialists, and administrators were given the opportunity to communicate their experience with the filter settings and voice their opinion via the online questionnaire. The survey received 315 responses. The following is a summary of the results.

Question 1: What is your role in your school or district? (n=314)

Nearly half (50%) of respondents identified themselves as teachers. Almost one third (30%) were technology staff. The remaining respondents (20%) identified themselves as administrators or "other" staff.

1. What is your role in your school or district?

	Response Percent	Response Count
technology staff	29.6%	93
teacher	49.7%	156
principal	3.8%	12
superintendent	2.9%	9
other	14.0%	44
If you are a teacher, please specify what subject(s) you teach. If you answered "other," please identify your role here: view		183
answered question		314
skipped question		1

Open-ended comments specifying what subject(s) respondents teach or what role(s) they play in their district are summarized in the table below.

Subject/Role	Response count	Subject/Role, cont.	Response count, cont.
English/Language Arts	27	Health/Phys Ed	5
Library Media Specialist	26	Art/Photography/Film	5
Math	17	Asst. Superintendent	5
Social Studies	13	Technology Education	3
Science	13	Guidance Counselor	3
Music	13	Theater	1
World Languages	12	Business	1
Tech Facilitator	12	"Ancillary Services"	1
Special Education	11	Paraprofessional	1
Elementary (all subjects)	10	Asst. Principal	1

Question 2: Has the current mandatory minimum filtering had any impact on teaching and learning in your school or district? (n=309)

A large majority of respondents (74%) reported that the current mandatory minimum filter settings have had a negative impact on teaching and learning in their school or district. Less than one fifth (19%) said that the filter settings have had no effect on teaching and learning, and a small minority (8%) reported a positive impact.

2. Has the current mandatory minimum filtering had any impact on teaching and learning in your school or district?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes – A positive effect		7.8%	24
Yes – A negative effect		73.5%	227
No – No effect		18.8%	58
If there has been a positive impact, please describe this impact. If there has been a negative impact, please describe this impact, including types of sites or categories that have been troublesome. Please include examples if possible.	view		223
	answered question		309
	skipped question		6

In the open-ended comments section, the most widely reported (n=65) problematic blocked category was "R-Rated," which includes video-sharing sites, such as YouTube and Google Video.

Almost 10% (n=22) expressed frustration with being blocked from Web 2.0 sites, including social networking sites and their blog and discussion features, which are categorized and blocked as "Dating/Personals."

Ten (10) respondents mentioned that valuable sites pertaining to health are blocked under "R-Rated," "Tobacco," and/or "Illegal Drugs." These respondents remarked that the blocked sites contained legitimate information on diseases, addiction, and substance abuse.

Ten (10) other respondents indicated that sites containing valid information on political and social issues are blocked under "Hate & Discrimination," "Weapons," or "Terrorist/Militant/Extremist."

Those who shared positive remarks commented on their satisfaction with the overall 8e6 product and the general benefits of a having a filter.

Sample open-ended comments from Question 2 follow on the next two pages…

Sample comments on NEGATIVE impact on teaching and learning*:
*(text has been pasted verbatim; typos left in)

- "Honestly, the way you are going about this is a form of censorship. Again, I must emphasize that I understand there is a need to have a filter to prohibit any abuse from people. But, I just want to perform my job and to the best of my ability and apply very crucial factors such as cost and appropriate materials. I think that you have to leave the decision to which site is blocked up to the administration of the building. Each school has different needs."

- "WHy would the state want to be involved??? Just provide filter and leave it up to the school district…Here in stamford we gave up and purchased our own."

- "Based on our experience with the filtering program, the minimum mandatory filtering level is too restrictive. Many websites needed to support instruction and the curriculum are blocked and the filter creates unecessary resource access hurdles for instructors that already are dealing with limited instructional time."

- "limiting access for teachers, makes teachers feel as though we are not trusted, dampens our initiative and limits our effort to fully use technology as a teaching tool."

- "As a professional educator, I am trusted with the well-being and education of hundreds of children, yet this filtering indicates that my judgement cannot be trusted. Finally, my school is lucky enought to have widespread access to computer technology, yet this limits our access dramatically. It is a step back, which is discouraging."

- "There's a defeatist attitude among teachers when finding sites that are very useful at home and then coming in to school only to find that they are unable to access them."

- "HATE" is blocked yet we teach classes on hate, discrimination, and tolerance."

- "Blocking the "Weapons" category has prevented access to information that may be useful in the higher grade levels during class debates."

- The block on the "Weapons" category has prevented access to websites that allow students to research things like the 2nd amendment. An example of blocked sites would be http://www.nranews.com. In addition to this, some teachers have complained about blocks on sites used to research medevil weaponry during social studies classes.

- "I teach health, it is nearly impossible to look up websites that include puberty, sexuality, hiv/AIDs etc on my school computer.I cannot utilize my planning time at school to plan new activities or get information/ new lesson ideas /enrich health lessons for my students because of blocks on the topics I teach."

- "student personal web pages cannot be checked for cyber-bullying issues and such by administration."

- "User created media is much more difficult to access than commercially created media. Translation: Content we have to pay for is easier to access than the content created by our students during the learning process."

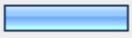
- "The new filtering system has been a complete disaster. Our teachers expect students to use YouTube, TeacherTube, Google Video, and an assorted of other blogs/websites for research. This new filtering system does not permit us to unblock the sites that our students and teachers require to teach and learn. The new wildcard unblock option does not work smoothly. There are even sites that we have added onto all unblock lists and still do not work. For, example we have YouTube on the unblocked lists, yet the original source for the YouTube video is blocked and the video cannot be played. The CEN option for us was to turn off the filtering all together. This was done for the week prior to the start of school, however this is not an option while school is in session. We teach students safe social networking and wish to incorporate this into our cybersafety curriculum and blended learning environments. This cannot be done if the filtering options are chosen for us. Each school district must be allowed to make their own decisions as to the minimum filtering. We were not given an option before this was implemented and this has had a significantly negative impact on teacher trust in technology and lowered integration of ICT into all curricular areas. Teachers are beginning to choose options not dependent on technology at this point. All the net gains we have built over the years are fading away quickly."

Sample comments on POSITIVE impact*:
*(text has been pasted verbatim; typos left in)

- "Teachers are more willing to use the Internet without fearing bad sites will pop up."
- "it has had a positive effect on the Tech Staff - I have less worry about keeping up with truly bad sites."
- "The new filter does an improved job at prevent the student use of proxy sites and has eliminated access to numerous sites that would have otherwise caused a distraction during instructional time."
- "The filtering blocks unsolicited and unwanted websites."
- "It keeps bandwidth abuse down and keeps students from inappropriate sites."

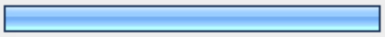
Question 3: Which of the following CEN filter settings would you favor? (n=313)

A majority of respondents (57%) remarked that they would favor having districts be able to maintain control of their filter configuration, with districts able to select which categories to block or unblock based on local decisions and policy. Less than one third (29%) favors keeping a minimum filter level in place but making it less restrictive. Approximately 13% wish to leave the filter settings as they are, and less than 2% favor making the mandatory minimum settings more restrictive.

3. Which of the following CEN filter settings would you favor?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Make the mandatory minimum filtering level more restrictive		1.6%	5
Leave the mandatory minimum filtering as is		12.8%	40
Keep a level of mandatory minimum filtering in place, but make it less restrictive (i.e. remove some blocked categories)		28.8%	90
Allow districts to maintain complete local control of their filter configuration (i.e. district selects which categories to block)		56.9%	178
	answered question		313
	skipped question		2

Question 4: If districts were able to completely manage their own filter configurations, someone of authority within the district would need to sign an agreement stating that the district accepts responsibility for maintaining its filter's configuration. Would a designated authority in your district be willing to sign such an agreement? (n=234)

Almost 90% of respondents indicated that a designated authority in the district would be willing to sign an agreement indicating that they accept responsibility for maintaining the configuration of their site's filter settings.

4. If districts were able to completely manage their own filter configurations, someone of authority within the district would need to sign an agreement stating that the district accepts responsibility for maintaining its filter's configuration. Would a designated authority in your district be willing to sign such an agreement?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		88.5%	207
No		11.5%	27
	answered question		234
	skipped question		81

Question 5: If you have any additional input regarding the network filter, feel free to share it here. (n=121)

Almost 40% of survey respondents included additional comments regarding the CEN filter. Sample negative and positive comments are included below. In general, the positive comments reflected users' satisfaction with the overall 8e6 product and/or CEN's customer service. The negative comments stemmed from users' frustrations with the restrictions of the mandatory settings.

5. If you have any additional input regarding the network filter, feel free to share it here:		
		Response Count
	view	121
	answered question	121
	skipped question	194

Sample open-ended comments from Question 5 follow on the next pages…

Sample NEGATIVE final comments*:
*(text has been pasted verbatim; typos left in)

- "8e6 is a far, far superior filter over the previous one used, so we are very glad with the change to 8e6, however not being able to unblock certain items at the District level is a real downside. Filters are not always accurate and sometimes incorrectly block sites that should be allowed as they are legitimate and valuable resources for education. We have had valuable educational resources that we once used become unavailable to our students and teachers and this has been a tangible loss. Please allow districts to maintain complete local control of their filter configuration. We would do so in a responsible manner that is in compliance with erate requirements and protects children."

- "State-level filtering makes little educational sense. It is the equivalent of the state getting into the book-banning business. Certainly some sites and technologies are inappropriate for certain levels, but there are many sites and technologies that become not only appropriate but essential for students at the upper levels. Leave it in the hands of the local districts. Thank you for asking!"

- "The only good thing the filter is good for is describing what life in China is like, with the government deciding what can and cannot be accessed by their citizens."

- "Let us police ourselves!"

- "Schools need to be able to teach students the proper use of technology. If information is summarily restricted, there is no way teachers can show how students can discriminate leavaing them completely vulnerable when they graduate."

- "The internet is a valuable tool that allows access to the world, please allow school districts to decide how restrictive to be in regards to access."

- "The old filter, while it could not block https sites effectively, was much easier to manage. Each district could block or unblock sites that it deemed acceptable or unacceptable. This new filter has made our work in the district much more difficult. Teachers are complaining daily about not being able to access sites that they are used to using to enhance and enrich their curriculum. Something needs to be done."

- "We need to teach students how to use the internet safely and effectively. Blocking useful sites simply makes students angry with the school and engages their curiousity. They then go home to view the site because they wonder what "bad stuff" caused it to be blocked. It is our job to instruct students, not to censor them."

- "I think the state should not be in charge of what each district is supposed to have on their web sites. The filter is a type of sensorship."

- "It is too restrictive the way it stands now. We must give control back to the district. They are the ones who can best determine the needs of their schools."

- "Please remove these stringent limitations until your committee makes its decision. Our 21st century educational process is coming to a screeching halt as teachers and students become more and more frustrated at their inability to teach and learn. I hope you are asking for input from teachers and certified directors of technology rather than only central office administrators who are not up to date on 21st century teaching strategies or network guys who aren't trained educators at all. You might also ask students. Thank you so much for soliciting opinions."

- "Each district is different. Each school has its own needs and possesses different opportunities to further student experiences. With the ability to monitor and maintain, a district could ensure greater success and opportunity for their students."

- "I am really upset with the way this was done. It has caused a lot of extra work for teachers, tech support and administrators. The preparation and explanations were inadequate or at least not directed to the people who must now manage the decisions that were made. This decision and the use of the filters really has interrupted the momentum we have been trying so hard to build. Even this survey is relatively anonymous and seems to be a reaction to the confusion and conflict that was created by whoever made these decisions. The genisis of this whole project is still unclear to me and my colleagues. Very heavy handed approach to managing a very valuable resource. Yes, control is needed but this was poorly done."

- "overall the filter works much better than the N2H2... However the minimum control set in place are a bit much. We did not have these setting prior and to be thrust into them was uncalled for. This survey should have been done before these setting were introduced."

- "The filter seems to be used as an excuse for not letting teachers have access to a number of sites; the interpretation of the filter and how it is applied should be discussed; also, different filters should exist for the different schools-- elementary and secondary are different groups of students."

- "In the prior system each school district was given the responsibility to make these decisions in the best interest of the students and teachers in their respected districts. This should be returned ASAP and not allow another month of educational access to resources continue. I fear the past month has had a damaging impact that may take years to recover from at this point. Let's not drag this on another month. These decisions can't be made in the future without discussions with the people most impacted by these decisions."

- "Sad to say we could not wait. State should not get involved in school political business. Even at district level it is not good policy to dictate what a school can and cannot view on the internet. Learn form the Public Libraries!"

- "I apreciate all that CEN has done for the districts, and in my opinion the staff at CEN does an outstanding job in supporting the schools. Given the vast array of schools and student populations CEN serves I think the best decision would be to put control in the hands of the districts and let them decide what is best for their student populations."

Sample POSITIVE final comments*:

*(text has been pasted verbatim; typos left in)

- "Overall, the new filter has been a success. I want to commend the staff at the CEN for their hard work and thorough planning. In my eyes, they performed a flawless implementation of the 8e6 product. End users were kept well informed throughout the process. Districts were given the opportunity for initial input and post-implementation feedback. The user training process was appropriate for the product. The new product has made the job of content filtering easier than before. Some of our biggest challenges included blocking games and a number of other nuisance/inappropriate websites. The 8e6 content filter is a much more robust products that is serving our district well. This change has made the services provided by the CEN an even more integral and critical part of our school district. Thanks for everything."

- "There is an increased comfort level that inappropriate sites are being blocked and a relief, to some extent, that Content Filtering is being maintained by a dedicated staff and does not have to be maintained by the local district. Occasionally, staff finds a site blocked, sometimes a download site, sometimes a message board, that they need or would like to get to. But we can generally work around that."

- "The new product has helped to reduce the amount of non-academic and inappropriate material that our students can access. According to my technical staff, the new solution works much better than the previous system."